

Energy Buzz – October 2005

Ways to Save Now That Your Energy Bill is About to Rise

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We hear about it almost every day in the news – natural gas and home heating oil prices are rising to perhaps the highest rate on record. So what can a homeowner do to survive the 2005-2006 heating season?

Your first thought may be to switch to a different fuel source. That can be expensive, especially if you have a newer system that's at least 80 percent efficient. So before you make any major changes, look at the way you live.

One of the first things you can do is check your furnace filter on a regular basis. Most filters should be cleaned or replaced every two or three months, depending on your living situation. If you have pets that live in the house, you may need to clean or replace it more often. A clean filter saves energy and is better for your health.

Do you keep your thermostat at 72 degrees F 24 hours a day, seven days a week? That's a lot of energy use if no one is home during the day. You can save an average of 10-15 percent annually in energy use by setting your thermostat at 65 degrees at night and when no one is home for more than a few hours. The daytime setting when your home is occupied should be no higher than 70 degrees.

If it seems like a big hassle to keep fiddling with the thermostat, there's light at the end of that tunnel. Home improvement stores sell programmable thermostats that are well worth the money. Look for the Energy Star® label when shopping for a reliable thermostat. They cost about \$30, depending on the brand and model, and can be set for four temperature settings during the weekdays and four different settings during the weekends.

The settings stay the way they are programmed until you change them, which is just as easy as setting your digital alarm clock. If you're not sure which thermostat to purchase, talk to one of the helpful people at the home improvement store.

Once you've installed this handy device and programmed it according to the instructions, watch your next few heat bills. In one area of the bill it will compare the number of therms or kilowatts used this year compared to the same time last year. These thermostats usually pay for themselves within a year through the energy savings.

Still wondering how to save energy? Look at the seals around your doors and windows. If you can see even a paper-thin gap around your doors, you may need to invest in some weather stripping. It's surprising how much cold air can come through those thin cracks.

Another way to look for air leaks is to light a candle on a windy day, then blow it out and run it over the seals in your exterior doors and windows. The smoke will follow the air leaks.

The Idaho Energy Division is here to help you save on your energy consumption. The division's low interest loan program can help you finance major renovations, such as insulation or a more efficient heating system and water heater. Call the Idaho Energy Hotline, 1-800-337-SAVE.